

Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee March 20, 2007 Meeting Summary

Attendees: Bill Frick, Debbie Brown, Delegate Bill Bronrott, Erwin Mack, Linda Katz, Lt. Ron Smith, Fred Lees, Debra Snead, Robin Jeweler, Hon. Kathy Porter, Mike Flood. Staff: Matt Greene, Lisa Rother. Guests: John Wetmore, TV show - Perils for Pedestrians; Goldie Rivkin, Liaison for Commission on Aging; Ben Stutz, Councilmember Ervin's office; Richard Hoyer, Councilmember Trachtenberg's office; Suhail Hishmeh.

Agenda items:

1. Welcome, approve January meeting summary
2. Feb 12 meeting with Public Information Officers
3. Speed camera program, other
4. Budget news.
5. Status of proposed changes to the Road Code
6. Next "Dialogue" – early May in the upcounty area?
7. Misc. informational items (Safe Routes to School grant awarded, status of PSAC expiration/extension, Street Smart campaign)
8. New business/citizen concerns

Item 1: Welcome, approve January meeting summary. Bill Frick opened the meeting about 6:35. Members hadn't had enough time to review the January meeting summary and Bill asked them to let him know later if there were any comments or corrections. None were submitted.

Item 2: Feb 12 meeting with Public Information Officers. Matt, Delegate Bronrott, and Linda met with public information officers from a number of key County agencies and the Montgomery County Public Schools on February 12. The discussion focused on what each agency could do to help promote the pedestrian safety and mobility message. Among the more general ideas generated was one to hire a professional PR / media relations consultant to work on leveraging free media and developing relationships with corporate partners and others. This might consume 10-15K of the 25K pedestrian safety budget next year. It was also noted that the Executive has proposed \$50,000 for an outreach campaign to non-native English speakers and the PIO will work on ideas for how best to utilize these funds if approved. (The PIO meeting summary is being sent to PSAC members with this document.)

Item 3: Speed camera program, other. Lt. Smith explained the progress being made on rolling out the speed camera program, how locations are chosen, the fines amounts and so forth. He noted that red running has decreased dramatically at the red light camera locations, but that citations are up because the new digital technology can catch multiple violators on a single signal cycle. Mayor Porter noted that Takoma Park would soon be establishing its own speed camera program. You can find more information on the program here:
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/poltmlpl.asp?url=/content/pol/ask/speed.asp>.

Lt. Smith passed around a copy of the "Asimo" pedestrian safety DVD that he got at the Street Smart kick off event. The message is aimed at elementary-school aged children and features Honda's robot Asimo. Lt. Smith said that the Police Department would work with its six district traffic safety officers to distribute the video to public and private elementary schools. Everyone seemed interested in the possibilities for distributing the content more widely, such as through

the County website. Delegate Bronrott offered to contact the Honda representative about getting large quantities of the video and about license issues with posting it and sharing it online.

There was some discussion about how to coordinate more PR activities and enforcement actions on the regional level outside of the four week Street Smart period. Everyone thought it was a good idea. Follow up ideas included working through the COG Police Chiefs group and also using a professional PR consultant (discussed in item 2 above).

Lt. Smith explained other efforts during the year to change peoples' travel behavior (primarily driving behavior), such as Smooth Operator Campaign (several weeks each summer oriented at aggressive driving), the Chief's Challenge from around early April through early June aimed at seat belt usage, and the back-to-school enforcements that happen each September.

Item 4: Budget news. Police and DPWT had little change in this year's proposed budget for pedestrian safety related items, except the new speed camera program, which in theory might operate near a revenue-neutral level. Matt explained that Mr. Leggett included \$50,000 in his proposed operating budget "to increase awareness concerning safe pedestrian behavior for people with limited English proficiency who are disproportionately involved in pedestrian traffic incidents." Discussion then returned to the idea (from item 2) of hiring a professional PR person out of the pedestrian safety budget. There was general agreement that this was a good idea and could make a big difference in our ability to communicate pedestrian safety messages.

Item 5. Road Code. Matt, Fred, and Ben all offered summaries of how the Road Code discussions had been going over the past two months. Bill Frick had given testimony to the Council in support of the purpose of the proposed changes, which is to "create more pedestrian friendly street environments." It was similarly noted, as in the January PSAC meeting, the complex nature of the proposed changes. Tradeoffs exist between different kinds of road users. For example, bikers want a wide outside lane in many circumstances, pedestrians want shorter crossing distances, and still others would like to limit the amount of paved surfaces in order to protect water quality. Views were generally optimistic, but somewhat mixed on the prospects for the final form of the bill to lead to greatly improved pedestrian conditions. Linda asked whether signal timing and pedestrian crossing times were included in this bill. The answer is no, but discussion remained on this topic. It was noted that signal timing issues have been brought up to DPWT over the years, but that little had changed. Fred explained how anticipated changes in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices to lower pedestrian crossing speeds from four feet per second to three and a half would be adopted by DPWT. It is a national standard that will force the change. Matt noted that it is currently within the purview of DPWT to lower the walking speed for calculating signal timing, therefore giving pedestrians more time to cross, but that the agency shows little or no evidence of making this change at any locations. He noted that it is currently an operational issue for engineers to decide, but one for which policy directives might be given if the tradeoffs in making changes could be explored would policy makers. Ben noted his office's interest in this issue and that he also feels that it should not be immune to policy influence from outside the agency.

Item 6. Next Dialogue: The signal timing flowed into the question of whether we should have another Dialogue. What effect will it have? Have agencies been responsive to problems identified in previous Dialogues? Several people said that they thought the Dialogues were useful in listening to citizen concerns and giving people an opportunity to learn from participants and agency representatives about how pedestrian safety issues are addressed in their areas. Matt noted that agencies are responsive to issues that they can fix and that citizens identifying problems can be very useful and effective. However, citizens do make complaints that are not

acted on, or at least not acted on in the manner requested. Fred explained that every specific complaint is evaluated, but that requests for new traffic control devices or other changes, for example, aren't always warranted or shown to provide increased safety. One example from Friendship Heights was, again, signal timing. In this case, it was suggested and generally agreed on, that hearing the complaint or suggestion in one location might not affect a change, but if we have more of these Dialogue meetings throughout the County and certain messages seem to resonate everywhere, then it builds pressure for changing things countywide. There was a general consensus that we should conduct the next Dialogue somewhere in the upcounty area.

On the subject of influencing decision making regarding pedestrian safety, Ben reminded the Committee that other interest groups – environment, smart growth, bicycling - had participated in Council staff discussions, but that no specifically pedestrian focused group was represented. He noted that the Council's Transportation and Environment committee would be discussing the Road Code the following Thursday and Tuesday and urged that someone from the PSAC attend.

Item 7: Misc. informational items. 1) The County is being awarded a Safe Routes to School grant in the amount of \$139,200. The money will be used to hire a full time coordinator through September 2008 and for miscellaneous support items, such as giveaways and incentive items to be used at participating schools. 2) The paperwork for extending the term of the PSAC is being processed; Council approval is anticipated. 3) There was a brief description of the annual Street Smart campaign.

Item 8: New Business/Citizen Concerns. Debbie noted her concern regarding hybrid cars and how quiet they are. This poses a danger for the visually impaired. It was noted that current crash data in Maryland probably doesn't collect information on whether involved vehicles are hybrids or not and how the data is not easily accessed electronically anyway to do research. John Wetmore suggested looking for research on this topic through the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety or the Transportation Research Board. He also suggested visiting www.saferoutesinfo.org and made a pitch for his latest episode of Perils for Pedestrians.

Richard Hoyer mentioned some interest at the state level in passing a comparative negligence law. Currently, Maryland has a contributory negligence law, which can make it difficult for an injured party. Debbie mentioned a 1988 case where a blind couple was killed. The drivers had been racing and the couple was just outside of the crosswalk. It seems this latter fact made it impossible for tough criminal or civil actions against the drivers. A change to comparative negligence would change this.

Mr. Hishmeh noted his dissatisfaction with dangerous traffic conditions, most notably speeding. He suggested a TV show about safe driving and walking, training for bus drivers, more radar signs, more lighting and striping, awards for good drivers.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:45.